



CSD *News Release*

Thursday, October 10, 2002

CSD OFFERS TIPS TO PROTECT CONSUMERS SHOPPING ONLINE, BY TELEPHONE, FAX OR MAIL

In another six weeks the 2002 holiday shopping season will be begin in earnest. Holiday decorations are up in many stores and merchants are already advertising sales for Columbus Day, next Monday October 14. They can also be expected to make similar offers for Veterans Day, Monday, November 11.

Many consumers will try to avoid the congestion of malls and other shopping centers during the shopping season by making their purchases online, by telephone, by fax, or through mail-order catalogs.

The Miami-Dade County Consumer Services Department (CSD) reminds consumers and merchants that the Federal Trade Commission's 'Mail or Telephone Order Rule' protects consumers who order goods over the Internet, by telephone, by fax or via the mail.

One of the areas covered by the law is delivery of goods.

"If the time period for delivery is not stated, the product must be delivered within 30 days," says Miami-Dade County's Consumer Advocate, Leonard Elias. He adds: "Where the time for delivery is stated, the product must be received within that promised time period."

If delivery is delayed beyond the promised delivery date, the consumer must be notified by the seller, and be given the option of consenting to a later delivery date, or canceling the order and receiving a full refund.

"Delivery time is calculated from the date when the buyer places an order," Elias points out.

The Consumer Services Department offers the following tips to consumers shopping by computer, telephone, fax or mail.

1. Save your paperwork to keep track of your order date. If you shop by computer, print the confirmation order.
2. If the merchandise is not received within the promised time, you must also be reimbursed for shipping and handling charges, as well as the product.
3. Where no delivery time was promised, the seller has to deliver the merchandise in 30 days. However, the FTC Rule allows this period to be extended to 50 days if the order was accompanied by a request from you to establish credit with the merchant.
4. If the merchandise you ordered was not available, the merchant cannot substitute something that is materially different, unless you have given your approval.
5. Call the consumer protection office where the seller is located to determine whether the company has a record of unsatisfied complaints.
6. Order early. The closer we get to the holidays, the more likely it is that your order will not be delivered on time.
7. Understand the merchant's return policy before you place the order to avoid any misunderstandings in the future.

Consumer complaints can be made to the CSD Consumer Hotline at (305) 375-3677.

Visit the Miami-Dade County Consumer Services Department website at

www.miamidade.gov/csd/.

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The Miami Dade Consumer Services Department is an agency of Miami-Dade County government that protects consumers through complaint mediation, business regulation, and consumer education. The Department operates the Consumer Hotline (305) 375-3677, a central telephone number for consumer complaints and information.